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Christie L. Borkowsky

Critical Wildlife Habitat Program, tgpphq@mymts.net

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MANITOBA TALL GRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE: PROVIDING HABITAT FOR PROTECTED AND PROVINCIAL RARE SPECIES

The establishment of the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve in 1989 secured some of the largest and highest quality parcels of tall grass prairie remaining in the province. Shortly after securement by either Nature Manitoba (formerly Manitoba Naturalists Society) or Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, seasonal staff from the Critical Wildlife Habitat Program (CWHP) began inventory efforts to document the various floral and faunal species occurring on these acquisitions. With the addition of the Nature Conservancy of Canada to the Preserve partnership, the Preserve has grown in size to nearly 5,000 ha. The list of species identified on the Preserve has also increased. To date, over 900 species have been documented for the area, several of which are considered rare and have been listed under the federal Species At Risk Act (SARA), the Manitoba Endangered Species Act (MB-ESA) and in a few cases, both acts. The Preserve also provides habitat for many provincially rare species, some of which have very limited distributions (Manitoba Conservation Data Centre 2012). Rarity of a species is assessed and assigned a provincial conservation status rank known as the S-rank (Manitoba Conservation Data Centre 2012).

Following two years of survey work in the late 1980s, a recommendation was made to establish a tall grass prairie preserve in south eastern Manitoba where some of the largest contiguous and highest quality tall grass prairie remnants remained (M. Latta, Nature Manitoba, personal communication). The CWHP was created in 1989 and adopted the Tall Grass Prairie Conservation Project from Nature Manitoba. That same year, the first three properties were purchased to begin what is now known as the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve. One of the properties was selected due to the presence of the western prairie fringed-orchid (*Platanthera praeclara* Sheviak & Bowles). Presently, all of the land that has been acquired for the Preserve falls in the western portion of the Rural Municipality of Stuartburn, approximately 100 km south of Winnipeg.

When a parcel of land is acquired, a baseline inventory is completed to document the flora and fauna. Along with confirmed identifications from other knowledgeable prairie enthusiasts, Preserve staff have identified: 465 species of plants (408 native, 57 exotic), 169 species of birds, 6 species of reptiles, 9 species of amphibians, 47 species of mammals, and 294 species of butterflies and moths (Critical Wildlife Habitat Program 2012). A recent study of the microlepidoptera will likely add an additional 20 to 30 species to the list. Among this list of nearly 1,000 species, 16 are currently listed under the federal SARA, 14 occur on the MB-ESA and many others are considered to be rare within the province (Table 1; Species at Risk Act 2011, Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada 2012, Manitoba Endan-

gered Species Act 2012). Additionally, there are a number of provincially rare species at the Preserve, including the plants: slender false foxglove (*Agalinis tenuifolia* (Vahl) Raf.) (S2S3), Cooper's milkvetch (*Astragalus neglectus* (Torr. & Gray) Sheldon) (S1), field sedge (*Carex conoidea* Schkuhr ex Willd.) (S1), showy tick-trefoil (*Desmodium canadense* (L.) DC.) (S2), wild crane's-bill (*Geranium maculatum* L.) (S1), two-flowered dwarf-dandelion (*Krigia biflora* (Walt.) Blake) (S2), four-flowered yellow loosestrife (*Lysimachia quadriflora* Sims) (S2), small sundrops (*Oenothera perennis* L.) (S1S2), northern adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum pusillum* Raf.) (S1), and dwarf huckleberry (*Vaccinium caespitosum* Michx.) (S2); as well as, the bird willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*) (S2S3B).

The CWHP brought together government and non-government organizations. The first five partners were Nature Manitoba, World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Habitat Canada, Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation and Manitoba Conservation. In 1993 and 1994, respectively, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service) joined in the efforts to protect the remaining tall grass prairie in Manitoba. Presently, World Wildlife Fund and Wildlife Habitat Canada are no longer active in this partnership, however, their contributions were vital for the securement of habitat, early inventory work and development of the a long term management strategy.

In the past 20 years, the Preserve has grown from 193 ha to slightly more than 5,000 ha. Organizations that hold title to property that form the Preserve include Nature Manitoba, Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation and Nature Conservancy of Canada. Provincial Crown lands within the Stuartburn Wildlife Management Area are also included in the Preserve. Since joining the Program in 1993, Nature Conservancy of Canada has taken a leadership role in habitat securement and now holds title to a majority of the Preserve property. All partners are involved in the development of annual monitoring and management plans for the Preserve. The goal of these plans is to ensure that all activities are effective in maintaining ecosystem viability and promoting beneficial management practices for tall grass prairie.

Preserve staff complete annual monitoring projects for small white lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium candidum* Muhl. ex Willd.), western prairie fringed-orchid and Great Plains ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes magnicamporum* Sheviak). Site visits are made to check on other protected and rare species occurring in the area. Over 38 research projects have taken place at the Preserve and several have featured protected species such as the Poweshiek skipperling (*Oarisma poweshiek*), western prairie fringed-orchid and small white lady's-slipper.—Christie L. Borkowsky. *Critical Wildlife Habitat Program, Box 24 - 200 Saulteaux Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3J 3W3; Corresponding author email address: tgp-phq@mymts.net.*

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Table 1. Protected species found in or near the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve. Federal and provincial legal designations along with an independently assessed designation and the provincial conservation status.

Scientific Name	SARA ^a	MB-ESA ^b	COSEWIC ^c	S-rank ^d
Plants				
<i>Cypripedium candidum</i>	EN	EN	EN	S1
<i>Oligoneuron riddellii</i>	SC	TH	SC	S2
<i>Platanthera praeclara</i>	EN	EN	EN	S1
<i>Spiranthes magnicamporum</i>		EN		S1S2
<i>Symphyotrichum sericeum</i>	TH	TH	TH	S1
<i>Veronicastrum virginicum</i>		TH		S1
Birds				
<i>Asio flammeus</i>	SC	TH	SC	S3S4B
<i>Caprimulgus vociferus</i>	TH	TH	TH	S4S5B
<i>Chordeiles minor</i>	TH	TH	TH	S3B
<i>Coturnicops noveboracensis</i>	SC		SC	S3S4
<i>Euphagus carolinus</i>	SC		SC	S3S4B
<i>Ixobrychus exilis</i>		EN		S2S3B
<i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>	TH	TH	TH	S2S3B
<i>Wilsonia canadensis</i>	TH	EN	TH	S4B
Reptiles and Amphibians				
<i>Chelydra serpentina</i>	SC		SC	S3
<i>Rana pipiens</i>	SC		SC	S4
Butterflies				
<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	SC		SC	S5
<i>Hesperia dacotae</i>	TH	TH	TH	S2S3
<i>Oarisma poweshiek</i>	TH	EN	TH	S2

^aSpecies at Risk Act (SARA) designations: Endangered (EN), Threatened (TH) and Special Concern (SC); ^bManitoba-Endangered Species Act (MB-ESA) designations: Endangered (EN), Threatened (TH) and Special Concern (SC); ^cCommittee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) designations: Endangered (EN), Threatened (TH) and Special Concern (SC); ^dProvincial Conservation Status (S-Rank): Very Rare (S1); Rare (S2); Uncommon (S3); Widespread (S4) and Breeding status (B).